

VZCZCXRO6883
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #1880/01 2821444
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 091444Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2307
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0308
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4922
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001880

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UN REP VERBEKE RAISES QUESTIONS ON
GENEVA, UN ROLE

REF: A. MOSCOW 2551
[1](#)B. GENEVA 822
[1](#)C. USUN 809
[1](#)D. TBILISI 1810
[1](#)E. TBILISI 1772

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and comment. In an October 7 meeting with the Charge, UN Representative Johan Verbeke asked about the U.S. commitment to the Geneva talks -- in particular whether A/S Gordon would be attending the November 11 round. He said Russia was looking for an excuse to downgrade the process, let it drift into irrelevance and die a quiet death. Admitting that the talks have gotten bogged down, Verbeke blamed EU Special Representative Morel for focusing more on process than content. Verbeke said that the new UN roving team in Georgia is in place and ready to begin work, but cautioned that any weakening of Geneva or the IPRMs could jeopardize the new team's mandate. He also warned that Russia would advocate naming a lower-level successor for his own position, due at the end of the year, thereby reducing Georgia's profile at the UN. He advocated a flexible approach toward an Abkhaz/South Ossetian de facto authority appearance at the UN, but did not offer a clear suggestion on what gain would be worth such a concession. End summary and comment.

GENEVA'S UP IN THE AIR

[1](#)2. (C/NF) UN Representative Verbeke (whose title has been downgraded from "Special Representative of the Secretary General") asked the Charge very directly whether Assistant Secretary Gordon would be attending the next round of the Geneva talks on November 11. He explained that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin is looking for an excuse to end his own involvement and in general diminish the prominence of the forum, and that A/S Gordon's presence would help counter this tendency. (Note: In a separate meeting with MFA, the Georgians have also suggested that Karasin is looking for an exit. See also ref A. End note) Verbeke thought that Russia would be content to see Geneva become an "Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism-Plus" (IPRM), i.e., a forum for interactions barely more significant than the IPRMs' -- in which case the very need for Geneva would come into question. He noted that Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Churkin, in discussing the IPRMs, asked "Do we need Geneva?" (apparently hypothetically). The Charge replied that in general, we consider Geneva a priority and intend to participate at the highest appropriate level, and in fact A/S Gordon was literally on the plane for the previous round before he was asked to remain in Washington on urgent business. However, the size and scale of A/S Gordon's portfolio made his participation dependent to a great deal on

scheduling.

13. (C/NF) Verbeke noted that the Russians have a point in their skeptical attitude toward Geneva, because in fact not much has been accomplished since February, when the IPRMs were first established. He suggested that they were applying typical American pragmatism in their evaluation of the process -- "We work with what works" -- and Geneva was not working. Verbeke placed the blame for this primarily on EU Special Representative for the Conflict in Georgia Pierre Morel. He said that Morel focuses almost exclusively on the format of the talks, to the near exclusion of content. As an example, he noted that in the preparation for the previous round, Morel had been more concerned about the arrangements for the dinner the night before the talks, and the lunch during the day, than about the agenda. He called the document on the non-use of force prepared by Morel's staff as the basis for discussion at Geneva the "work of a first-tour diplomat," and criticized the fact that it was distributed only a couple days before the talks.

14. (C/NF) In more general terms, Verbeke pointed out that a non-use of force agreement -- the main subject for Working Group 1 at the previous round (ref B) -- was clearly going nowhere. Morel therefore needed to take the initiative to set a more formal agenda and focus on more limited but achievable objectives. Verbeke said that Morel would be in Tbilisi the week of October 19 and suggested arranging a Quad meeting to strategize on the future direction of Geneva.

UN ROLE UNCLEAR

TBILISI 00001880 002 OF 002

15. (C/NF) Verbeke explained that the new UN roving team for Georgia was in place and ready to begin its duties (ref C). (Note: According to a UN staff member, although UNOMIG ceased operations in June, it has gradually been disposing of equipment, emptying locations and in general shutting down operations; its official last day is October 31, and the new team's first day will be November 1. Even so, the new team is already in place and operating. End note.) He expressed concern, however, that the OSCE's poorly conceived efforts to establish a similar presence, which had not taken Georgian government concerns into account, could backfire on the UN team. He himself had been discussing the UN team's modalities with the Georgians for months, and he was not surprised that the Greek effort to make arrangements at the last minute had not been successful (ref D).

16. (C/NF) In this case too, Verbeke was worried that Russia would try to diminish the UN's role. He explained that the Secretary General (SYG) sent a letter to the UN Security Council (UNSC) informing it of the establishment of the new team. According to Verbeke, however, the Russians do not want the UNSC to reply, because they want to downplay the UN's presence and role in Georgia. Likewise he suspects that when he completes his tenure on December 31, the Russians will seek a lower-level replacement to succeed him in order to diminish the position's authority. His title has already been downgraded from Special Representative of the SYG to simply UN Representative. Finally, Verbeke drew a link between his concerns about Geneva and his concerns about the UN, explaining that if the Geneva process loses prominence or shuts down completely, or if the IPRMs decrease in profile, then the reason for the new UN team could be questioned.

DON'T FORGET THE DE FACTOS

17. (C/NF) Verbeke encouraged the United States to consider allowing Abkhaz and South Ossetian de facto officials to travel to New York to provide information in an informal setting. He understood that this would be difficult for the Georgians, but suggested that doing so could provide an opening toward a better relationship with the de factos. He

argued that they (in particular the Abkhaz) really did want a relationship with the west, and indulging them with an inconsequential meeting in New York could reap benefits.

COMMENT: MAINTAINING GENEVA'S -- AND GEORGIA'S -- PROFILE

¶8. (C/NF) Ever since the de facto authorities gained the status of de facto members of the Geneva talks, the Georgians have been wary of the process, because they fear it gives the de factos too much stature. Nevertheless, the Georgians do appreciate the continued attention the talks give to the unresolved situation in Georgia. They also appreciate U.S. involvement. If the Geneva process were to lose prominence or cease functioning altogether, and the IPRMs -- where the United States does not have a seat -- were to be put forward as a replacement, the Georgians could well pull out of both. Allowing this to happen would play right into Russia's hands by killing off the fora, but pinning the blame on Georgia.

¶9. (C/NF) Verbeke is correct, however, in his assessment of Geneva's unimpressive record. Geneva remains the one forum where all parties sit down together, and where the international community is reminded on a regular basis of the unresolved conflict in Georgia, but so far it has little to show in the way of success. The United States will have to decide if Geneva is worth the effort. If it is, we will need to make a concerted effort to maintain it and make it more relevant by focusing on concrete, achievable objectives. Otherwise Russia will likely succeed in allowing it to fade into oblivion.

¶10. (C/NF) It will be important to follow through at the UN to keep the spotlight on Georgia. One step might be to seek periodic reports from the new roving team. In post's view, however, the de factos will need to offer a serious concession of their own before we should accept Verbeke's recommendation and invite them to provide a briefing in New York (ref E).

LOGSDON